

Statement on Final Passage of H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

Friday, 13 February 2009

Now is the time to act boldly to create jobs, strengthen the frayed safety net, begin to fix our health care system, and make long-overdue investments in education, scientific innovation, and infrastructure that will spur our economy forward in the years to come. This legislation achieves all of these goals.

For the Congressional Record

February 13, 2009

MR.

STARK: Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the Conference Report on HR 1, the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009."

The economic challenges we are confronted with are as serious as any we've faced since the Great Depression. There is no doubt that we are paying the price for eight years of unregulated markets, regressive tax breaks, and a lack of investment in the needs of the American people. Now is the time to act boldly to create jobs, strengthen the frayed safety net, begin to fix our health care system, and make long-overdue investments in education, scientific innovation, and infrastructure that will spur our economy forward in the years to come. This legislation achieves all of these goals.

As Chairman of the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, I am most proud of the health provisions in this legislation.

It is no overstatement to say that the development of an interoperable health information technology system in America will revolutionize medicine. HR 1 does just that. In addition to increasing efficiency and reducing unnecessary spending in our medical system, electronic health records will enable doctors to have the information they need — at their fingertips — to best treat their patients.

By building financial incentives into Medicare and Medicaid, and developing new grant programs, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that this bill will encourage 90 percent of physicians in America to adopt standardized health IT and that 70 percent of America's hospitals will do the same. They also calculate that the improvements from this legislation will generate more than \$12 billion in savings from federal health programs and reduce health insurance premiums in the private sector as well.

HR 1 also makes

a substantial investment to expand comparative effectiveness research. Right now, patients with the same diagnosis often receive dramatically different treatment. Medicine is an art, but also must be guided by science. By investing in this research, doctors and other health care providers will be able to obtain unbiased information regarding which procedures, pharmaceuticals, devices and other treatments work best for particular conditions. That way, they can choose the right treatment from options that have been independently evaluated.

If you've heard any controversy about this provision, it's because the pharmaceutical and medical device industries are spending millions of dollars to drum up opposition. They don't want doctors or patients to be able to objectively evaluate the value of their products. The smear campaign of disinformation has also been advanced by conservative ideologues in a cynical effort to foment distrust and discord prior to beginning a national conversation on health care reform. In fact, this research is broadly supported by a wide range of groups representing patients, physicians, health care organizations, unions and others. I ask consent that supporting materials be placed in the Record following this statement.

HR

1 also protects the health care coverage for millions of workers who are losing their jobs because of our economic crisis. COBRA health continuation coverage provides a vital bridge for people to maintain their health benefits when they are between jobs. However, an average family COBRA premium is more than \$1000 a month — a financial commitment most unemployed workers can't afford on top of their mortgages and other costs of daily living. By providing a 65 percent subsidy for these premiums for up to 9 months, HR 1 will help more than seven million people maintain their health coverage while they seek new employment.

When HR 1 is signed into law, the 111th Congress and President Obama will have done more to advance health care in America in less than two months, than was done over the entire two terms of the Bush Administration. We will also have set forth a solid road to move into the debate to guarantee that each and every person in America has affordable, quality health care that can't be taken away.

In addition to the vital health care provisions, HR 1 includes essential provisions that will stimulate our economy in the short-term and build a foundation for long-term prosperity. By funding "shovel-ready" road, rail, water, school, and energy infrastructure projects we will create millions of new jobs, including more than 7,500 in my district. By bolstering safety net programs such as Unemployment Insurance and Food Stamps we are giving assistance to those hardest hit by the downturn. By investing in all levels of education, science, and clean energy we are setting the stage for economic renewal and the innovation that will

drive our economy.

As President Obama has said, we will not get out of this economic mess overnight. But we can take the bold action that the current crisis demands and start the process of rebuilding our economy by passing the legislation before us today.